Grassland & Shrubland Vegetation

Preliminary Alternatives Handout

Missoula Field Office, Resource Management Plan Revision

April, 2018

Key Points

- Approximately 3% of BLM-managed lands in the planning area are non-forested (less than 10% canopy cover); the other 97% are dominated by a forested canopy with limited mountain meadows, shrublands, and grasslands. See table 1 on the following page for a break-down of BLM-managed grassland and shrubland in the planning area classified under the National Vegetation Classification System (NVCS).
- The overall management goal of grassland and shrubland resources is to maintain diverse upland ecological conditions while providing for a variety of multiple uses that are economically and biologically feasible.

Alternatives

Alternative A (1986 Garnet RMP, as Amended)

Maintain, or where practical enhance, site productivity on all public land available for livestock grazing: (a) maintain current vegetative condition in “maintain” and “custodial” category allotments; (b) improve unsatisfactory vegetative conditions by one condition class in certain “improvement” category allotments; (c) prevent noxious weeds from invading new areas; and, (d) limit utilization levels to provide for plant maintenance.

Alternatives B & C (common to all)

Proposed objectives:

- Manage uplands to meet health standards and meet or exceed proper functioning condition within site or ecological capability. Where appropriate, fire would be used as a management agent to achieve/maintain disturbance regimes supporting healthy functioning vegetative conditions.
- Manage surface-disturbing activities in a manner to minimize degradation to rangelands and soil quality.
- Mange areas to conserve BLM special status species plants.
- Ensure consistency with achieving or maintaining Standards of Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management for Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Rangeland health monitoring and assessments would be conducted within current staffing capabilities. Rangeland health monitoring plans would be developed and implemented at the field office level. Allotments within Fish Key Watersheds would be high priority for reassessment of land health standards and processing grazing permits.
- Use land treatments (i.e. prescribed fire, mechanical, and hand fuels treatments) to achieve and maintain fire regimes, watershed desired conditions, grazing management objectives, and wildlife habitat objectives.

Alternatives

Alternative B

- Land treatments would be prioritized based on achieving and maintaining fire regimes, desired watershed conditions, grazing management objectives, and wildlife habitat objectives. Rest periods from livestock grazing of less than two growing seasons in vegetation treatment areas may be desirable in some circumstances, and would be determined through site-specific interdisciplinary team planning, monitoring, and environmental review.
- Manage uplands and shrublands for native species where feasible. Where Timothy and smooth brome grass species dominate an area, evaluate proper functioning condition and determine if restoration of these areas back to native grass species at the site-specific level is appropriate.
- Where feasible, all surface disturbances would be reseeded/revegetated with native plant species common to the site's natural plant community. Site-specific environmental analysis may warrant the use of introduced species where difficult site stabilization or wildlife concerns prevail.

Alternative C

- Land treatments would be prioritized based on achieving wildlife habitat objectives and desired watershed conditions. Rest periods from livestock grazing in vegetation treatment areas may be desirable in some circumstances, and would be determined through site-specific interdisciplinary team planning, monitoring, and environmental review.
- Where Timothy and smooth brome grass species dominate the area, restore these areas back to native grass species.
- All surface disturbances would be reseeded/revegetated with native plant species common to the site's natural plant community.

Table 1. Acres of BLM-managed grassland and shrubland in the planning area classified under the National Vegetation Classification System (NVCS).

NVCS Standard Macro Groups	BLM-managed lands (Acres)
Inter-Mountain Basins Big Sagebrush Steppe	45
Inter-Mountain Basins Montane Sagebrush Steppe	1,095
Northern Rocky Mountain Lower Montana, Foothill, and Valley Grassland	2,922
Northern Rocky Mountain Montane-Foothill Deciduous Shrubland	169
Northern Rocky Mountain Subalpine-Upper Montane Grassland	600
Northern Rocky Mountain Subalpine Deciduous Shrubland	87
Rocky Mountain Subalpine-Montane Mesic Meadow	169
Total	5,087

Source: National Vegetation Classification System Database.